

Dream Away

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Summary: It's been three years since Simba last had a dream. But then they come back...

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Three Years Later

AN: Do you like having your brains exercised? Don't worry, I'm not making this story educational or anything – but it is a bit of a... 'challenge', if you get what I mean. You'll see...

Dream Away

Chapter One: Three Years Later

It had been three years since Simba last had a bad dream.

His life had become better. His life as a cub was fraught with villainy and pain – like he had been contaminated with some kind of deadly disease. A disease that – one day – might just kill him. He'd been infected with deadly diseases before. They weren't exactly the most pleasing things in the world to have.

But he didn't have to worry about that any more. Life in the Pride Lands had become much happier and peaceful. It all ended with that one dream. At least, Simba *thought* it was a dream. His... whole world had been changed. Manipulated. And Simba feared that his whole life was finally over. His potential had been squandered.

And, all of a sudden, he won again. Like he always did. He was a very fortunate cub. The luckiest cub in the world.

But all luck had to run out sometime – *didn't* it?

Apparently not. Things were pretty happy. Of course, there was the occasional problem – the death of his parents, Mufasa and Sarabi, had a profound effect on him. However, there was always something to keep him going. They lived in him. They may be gone – but the memory of them lived on for ever.

Besides, he still had Nala – and she was the most important thing in his life. After so many years, she still remained faithful to him. She still loved him. It was as if nothing had ever changed. It didn't *feel* like anything had changed. Everything seemed perfect...

It was hard to even imagine that was a time when Simba would have to defend his future kingdom every single day – now *that* was a challenge! He didn't know where he even found the strength in that tiny little body of his...

But, strangely enough, ever since that day with the dream, a problem had never ever occurred in the Pride Lands. Simba had smoothly made the transition from Prince to *King* of the Pride Lands without a hitch.

He had grown up now. He wanted to forget all about the hard times of his cubhood. He wanted to focus on what was happening right now. Instead of dwelling on the past, he just wanted to focus on his future. He had so many plans. So many things that he wanted to do.

And one of those things – hopefully – he would accomplish tonight.

"Come on, Simba," said Nala, pulling him through the gap in between two trees that were close together. Even though she had grown up, Nala still had that eager glint in her eyes. That eager glint that just never seemed to go away. She was still a cub at heart. "We need to get there before it gets dark."

Simba chuckled, brushing away part of the long red mane that covered his face. "All right, all right," he said, smiling. "Just where are we going, Nala?"

"Simba, by now you should *know* where we're going," Nala replied jokingly. "Can you even remember what day it is?"

"Of course I can," Simba responded confidently. "Um... Erm... How many days are in the week again?"

Nala giggled. "Simba, it's that day again," she explained. "We've been married for two years now. I can't even *believe* that you asked me when you were—"

"Just a teen," Simba finished with a grin. "Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. You know what we were like at that age. Hugging, kissing—"

"Among other things," Nala remarked with a sly smile, giving him a sneaky look. "Other things that... we may just experience again tonight – if you don't mind, of course."

"Have I ever minded before?" Simba retorted. "I still can't get over the fact that you said yes! Yes! To marrying me when

we were just teens! *Young* teens, at that."

Nala couldn't help but laugh, nodding in agreement. "I know! Oh, I couldn't believe the look on your mother's face!"

"My mother?" Simba's smile widened. "You should have seen Zazu! His eyes looked like they were going to pop out! I think he almost choked on his orange!"

They both laughed, before Simba sighed. "Still..." he said, a twitch of a frown appearing on his face. "All gone now..."

"Yeah..." An awkward moment of silence passed, before Nala hit him playfully on the shoulder. "Oh, come on, Simba. Let's just try to enjoy this moment, okay? With no distractions."

"Moment?" Simba raised an eyebrow, stepping closer to his mate, whispering in her ear. "I didn't realise this was... a *romantic* moment."

Nala gave him a confused look. "What other kind of moment would it be?"

Simba shrugged. "An... *unromantic* moment?" he suggested with a shrug.

Nala laughed, before pouncing at Simba, pinning him down to the ground – like she always did, ever since they were cubs. "Oh, Simba – even when you're not trying to be romantic, you still... do something to me. Have you got special powers, by any chance?"

"Not that I'm aware of," was his reply. "Maybe it's *you* that has the special powers."

"Oh, really?" Nala chuckled, pressing her forepaws down on Simba's chest. "Well, Simba, do you ever have... *dreams* sometimes?"

"Yeah – just not bad ones," he told her. "I haven't had a bad dream in *years*. Back when I missed that day... A whole day of my life... *gone*..."

"You're getting weird again," Nala pointed out.

"Sorry. Now, what were you saying about dreams?" Simba asked.

"Do you ever have those kind of... *lifelong* dreams?" Nala continued, giving him a flirtatious look. "Dreams that... you really, really want to come true?"

"Depends on what they are," said Simba, knowing where Nala was going with this.

"Ever considered us having a cub of our own?" Nala finally asked. "We could definitely do with one. You don't want the kingdom going to... Haiba, do you?"

"Haiba?" Simba chuckled. "Last time I checked, his mother won't even let him take her place yet. Apparently she discovered some kind of... technique that keeps her young and energetic." He shook his head. "I don't think I'll ever understand the Grand Lands..." He looked into the eyes of his Queen. "So, you were saying – cubs."

Nala nodded. "Yes, I was, Simba. It's kind of... something I've wanted for a really long time, but... I wasn't ready until now."

"Well, how did you know when you *were* ready?" Simba wondered, a slightly puzzled look on his face.

"I... I don't know," Nala finally said after a moment of silence. "It's just that... I know, you know?"

"That was three 'knows'. You're breaking your all-time record," Simba joked with a smile. "And the answer is 'yes', by the way."

Nala narrowed her eyes at him. "Answer to what?" she said, confused.

"If I want to have a cub or not," Simba explained. "Yes. I do. So, so much. I still remember those names, too."

"What?" Nala giggled, resting her head on Simba's chest. "Kiara and Kopa? You have a very good memory, don't you?"

"So do you," said Simba. "We'll either have a very beautiful daughter—"

"Or a very handsome son," Nala finished for him, before rising, staring down into his auburn eyes. "So... are you ready for the ride of your life?"

"I've been ready for ages," was Simba's response.

Nala giggled. "Oh, you are so gonna get a slap from me," she joked, before kissing her mate passionately on the muzzle.

It wasn't long before things started to get a bit racy, and Nala released Simba from the kiss, before lowering her head towards the bottom half of his body. Lower, lower, lower...

"Ah!" a familiar voice exclaimed from beside the two, interrupting their intimate moment.

Simba and Nala turned their heads to the side, and found themselves looking at Haiba. He looked a lot bigger now – of course being an adult – and sported a long, light brown mane.

"Simba! Nala!" he said, grinning. "It's so good to see you! Sorry to interrupt your sexually tantalising moment, but I just couldn't resist. I just *had* to see you."

"Haiba?" Nala got to her paws, heading over to her friend and hugging him. "It's good to see you, too!"

"Is there always a line for hugs when you're around?" Simba teased, standing by Nala's side. "Certainly seems like there is..."

"Oh, don't be like that," said Haiba, giving Simba a hug and a sneaky kiss on the cheek. "Nice fur, by the way. But anyway... what have you been up to, Mister King of the Pride Lands?"

"Nothing much," Simba told him. "Just... this and that. Making sure all the animals are in check and... Well, that's pretty much it. It's all pretty quiet these days. Not as exciting as when we were cubs."

"Yeah..." Haiba's voice sounded distant. "What's it been, three years since I last saw you?"

"Three years exactly," Nala confirmed. She glanced at Simba. "I've counted the days."

"Don't you die of boredom doing the same thing all day?" Haiba wondered, his eyes narrowed. "What do you do get rid of that kind of stuff?"

"Oh, we relax, we live..." Simba replied. "We..." He looked up at the sky. "Listen to the birdsong."

The sound of birds tweeting could be heard.

Nala pointed at the sky. "Yeah, see? Birds. Cool, huh?"

"Didn't have much time for birdsong back in the old days," Simba remarked.

The birdsong became louder. Haiba's eyes started to flicker. "Ooh, whoa..." he said, putting a paw to his temple, stumbling a bit. "My head's feeling a bit... funny. But you're right. We never had any time for birdsong back in the..." He slowly sank to the ground, his eyes shutting. "Old..."

The three of them collapsed to the ground, fast asleep.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Trapped in the Cave

Chapter Two: Trapped in the Cave

"... Days," Haiba mumbled in his sleep, before his eyes snapped open. He looked around, and quickly became disoriented. "What? No. Yes. Sorry. What?"

He looked around the empty cave he was in, and soon spotted Simba and Nala in the corner, confused expressions on both their faces. They both looked like they had woken up from some kind of dream...

Oddly enough, that's how Haiba just felt.

"Oh, you're okay," he said to the two. "I can't begin to tell you how happy I am! I had a terrible nightmare about you two." He sighed, looking down at the ground. "That was scary." He waved a paw at Simba and Nala as they approached him. "Don't ask, you don't want to know."

Haiba hugged Simba as tight as he could. "You're safe now. That's what counts," he told him.

"Oh, okay," Simba said, giving Haiba a confused look, pulling away from the hug. Just what was his problem...?

Simba, Nala and Haiba were stuck right in the middle of a dark, damp cave. They were *trying* to find the Lost Treasure of Njama Kifaa, but thanks to a gopher who gave them the wrong directions, they ended up here instead. Trapped. Never had they found themselves in such a claustrophobic situation before.

"I have never fallen asleep like that before," Haiba mumbled, slowly getting to his paws. "*Never*. It's really weird. I know how to control when I sleep. It's a Grand Lands trick."

"There are a *lot* of Grand Lands tricks, according to you," Simba told him. Haiba knew so many different things that it was hard to keep count. Simba lost him after the seventy-ninth trick, which involved Zazu, a sharp stick and an elephant... He shuddered at the thought of that incident. Never again... "Just how many are there, anyway?"

"Four thousand and seventy-two," Haiba replied, having memorised the exact number. His mother had passed down good memory skills to him. You had to be clever in a world like this. Especially when you were stuck inside a cave with very little room to move about in and barely any oxygen left. "What is wrong with me?" he asked, putting a paw to his head. He felt strange... Just like when he was in that dream a few minutes ago. "I think I must be getting old. Is this what growing up feels like?"

"How are we going to get out of here?" Nala asked, shivering a little. It was cold down here – *too* cold for her liking. She wished caves were a bit more... warmer. But then that would probably take away the tense atmosphere. "Looks like we're stuck. I mean, really, properly... *stuck*."

"Um, Haiba, I also had a kind of... dream thing," Simba confessed, looking a little puzzled.

Nala looked at her boyfriend. "Yeah, so did I," she said, sharing Simba's puzzled expression.

"Not a nightmare, though," he said to Nala quickly, nodding. "Just... We were married."

Nala nodded, her eyes widening. "Yeah. We were in the jungle, and..." She trailed off, finally beginning to get an idea of what was going on.

"We were in the jungle and..." Simba's eyes widened, before he put a paw to his mouth to keep himself from throwing up all over the floor. "Aw!" he exclaimed, disgusted. "Why was I dreaming about that?" he complained. "I'm not ready for... *that* yet!"

Nala grimaced, sharing his reaction. "I know," she agreed, nodding. "It's not exactly the first thing I think about every morning when I wake up. Until I woke up... just now, of course," she said with a little laugh.

Haiba – his eyes wide – slowly walked over to Simba and Nala, staring at them. A horrible realisation was occurring to him.

"So you had the same dream, then," Simba concluded, pointing at Nala with a claw. "*Exactly* the same dream?" He turned to Haiba. "Haiba, in the dream, you, you were visiting."

"Yeah." Nala nodded. "You were interrupting our..." She sighed. "*Moment* in the jungle."

"How can we have had exactly the same dream?" Simba wondered, completely confused and lost now. "It doesn't make any sense."

"And you had a nightmare about us," Nala said to Haiba. "What happened to us in the nightmare?" she asked him.

Haiba forced himself to smile a little. "It was a little bit similar in some aspects," he told them.

"Which aspects?" asked Simba.

"All of them," Haiba responded. Now all three of them knew what had happened – and it was something very, very, very strange indeed...

"You had the same dream," Nala realised, staring at Haiba with wide eyes. "The same dream as us."

"Basically," said Haiba, giving her a nod.

"You said it was a nightmare," Simba pointed out.

"Did I say nightmare?" Haiba asked, his eyes narrowed. "No. More of a really good... mare." He shook his head, grinning. "Look, it doesn't matter. We all had some kind of psychic, weird episode – probably caused by the stress of being trapped inside this cave."

The sound of loud birdsong was heard as he continued. "Forget it, we're back to reality now." He turned around, heading for one of the cave walls.

"Haiba, if we're back to reality, how come I can still hear birds?" Nala wondered, a worried tone in her voice, looking up at the cave ceiling.

"Yeah, the same birds," Simba agreed, also hearing the birdsong. "The same ones we heard in the..."

Simba's eyes snapped open, finding himself once again in the jungle, looking like an adult. "... Dream," he finished, staring into Haiba's eyes.

He shook his head. "Oh. Sorry. Fell asleep," he said. "I'm stupid. I'm exhausting myself out here." He shot a glance at Nala, who was also an adult again. "And I haven't even started yet. I was dreaming we were stuck in a cave."

"You had the same dream, didn't you?" Haiba asked, pointing at Nala, a concerned look in his eyes.

Nala nodded. "Stuck in that cave," she confirmed. "Weren't we just saying the same thing?"

"But we thought this was the dream," said Simba, pointing to the ground. "*Didn't* we?" he asked, beginning to doubt himself on what was real and what wasn't.

"I think so," Nala replied, slowly getting to her paws, her eyes flickering. "Why do dreams have to fade away so quickly?"

"Haiba, what is going on?" Simba asked.

"Is this because of you?" Nala demanded. "Is this because of some... Grand Lands thing because you've shown up again to see us?"

"Listen to me," said Haiba, his voice low. "Trust nothing. From now on, trust nothing you see, hear or feel."

"But we're awake *now*," Simba insisted.

"Yeah, you thought you were awake in the cave, too," Haiba reminded him.

"But we're home," Nala said, looking around the jungle. "Sort of."

"Yeah. You're home, you're also dreaming." He circled the area, before turning to his two friends. "The problem is, Simba, Nala, which is which? Are we flashing forwards..." He narrowed his eyes. "Or backwards? Hold on tight..." He smiled. "This is gonna be a tricky one."

AN: Get it now? You're gonna like this...

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: Trust Nothing and No One

AN: Nice to see you're very confused. I excel at confusion, as I'm sure you know by now.

Kutiel - Kwame: *Memento*? Never saw it. Come to think of it, I never saw *Inception* either. This story isn't inspired by those movies. But it does keep you guessing, doesn't it?

626and624: Ah, yes, the trivia. It's not *quite* connected to this story, but still a good guess.

Chapter Three: Trust Nothing and No One

Nala woke with a gasp, and quickly found herself in the cave again, trapped with Simba and Haiba. She looked her body over. She was back to being a cub again. There was something seriously wrong... Why was she dreaming about being an adult in the future?

Or... was she dreaming about being a cub in the past? It hurt her brain just thinking about it...

Simba leant against the cave wall, panting heavily. "I... I don't like this," he said, a worried look on his face. He hit the wall in anger, and winced in pain, his paw aching. "Ow... Remind me never to use force again. It's just embarrassing. Unless you're mad, in which case – *always* use force."

Haiba sat on the ground in the corner, resting his head on his forepaws. He was trying to figure this out... but it was hard. Maybe it was *too* hard for a cub – or adult, depending on what was actually real – like him to figure out. His brain was fresh out of ideas and theories. What he'd give for a bigger brain...

"Okay," said Simba, holding up a paw in the air. "Is there something wrong with this cave?" he asked. "Is that what's causing us to dream about the future?" He felt too tired to think... Things like that become hard when you've only just woken up.

"If we were dreaming about the future," replied Haiba, his eyes narrowed, resulting in a puzzled reaction from Nala.

"Of course we were," Nala assured him. "We were in the jungle, doing..." She rolled her eyes. "Well, you *know* what we were doing – but that's not the point."

"Yeah, and we still *could* be in the jungle, dreaming of this," Haiba countered, wandering around the darkened, cramped confines of the cave. He didn't like being in small, tight spaces. It was as if the walls were closing in on him...

Haiba quickly shook his head, bringing himself back to his senses. This place was messing with his head. *Everything* was messing with his head... "Don't you get it?"

Nala shook her head, looking around. "No, no, this is real. This is *definitely* real. I am definitely awake now," she stated, nodding. She was awake. She *knew* she was awake. This wasn't a dream.

"And you thought you were awake when you were rubbing your body up and down Simba's," said Haiba, pointing at her, his eyebrows raised. "I told you, trust nothing we see or hear or feel." He gestured around the cave. "Look around you. Examine everything. Look for all the details that don't seem true to you."

"Okay." Simba nodded. "We're trapped for ever in a cave deep underneath the ground—"

"With a very weird cub for company," Nala finished for him, staring at Haiba.

Simba frowned. "Somehow 'all the details that seem true to you' isn't really that simple," he remarked.

Haiba sighed. "Good point," he agreed. Honestly, he didn't know what to do. This wasn't like talking or fighting against a person. This was just plain random. There were no signs to what – or *who* was causing this. He at least wanted an explanation! Was that *really* too much to ask for?

The loudness of birdsong invaded the cave. The same birdsong that always managed to make them fall asleep...

He looked at his two friends. "Remember – *this* is real," he said, pointing to the ground upon hearing the sound. "But when we wake up in the other place, remember how real this feels," he advised.

Nala nodded in understanding. "It's real," she told herself. "I *know* it's real."

Nala woke up in the jungle again, and patted the ground, nodding. "Okay, this is real," she stated, a smile forming on her face. "This is the real one. *Definitely* the real one. I'm sure of it."

This had to be real. She couldn't be a cub again – she had grown up now! This was what was real. That whole 'stuck in the cave' scenario was just some crazy dream. The nostalgic side of her was coming out again. Maybe it was time for her to let go of her time as a cub—

"It felt real in the cave, too," Simba responded, looking around the jungle surroundings. "You can't spot a dream while you're having it." He waved a paw in front of his face.

"What are you doing?" Haiba asked, staring at him, confused.

"I'm checking for blurs and stuff," he replied, continuing to wave his paw around the place. "We could have sniffed some flowers. Flowers that are starting to make us see... What's the word I'm looking for?"

"Hallucinations?" Haiba suggested with a shrug.

Simba grinned, nodding. "That's the one. Maybe we're seeing hallucinations." He returned his paw to the ground, shaking his head, feeling quite devastated. "I don't think so, though."

"*This* might be the dream," Haiba insisted, walking between Simba and Nala, pulling them close. He turned to Simba. "This could be your dream mate, your dream home, maybe even your dream son—"

"Or daughter," Nala cut in, glaring at Haiba. "You can't exactly pick and choose what gender your child is going to be, you know."

"Don't start arguing with me, Nala," Haiba said. "You're getting sucked into the world. I told you not to think about it too much. Before you know it you'll be completely convinced that this is your life, and this is how you want to carry on living. I'm warning you now – this could get much worse."

"There's something here that doesn't make sense," said Simba, listening out for any signs of life. "I can't hear anything. It's quiet – *too* quiet." He narrowed his eyes. "There's something here that doesn't make sense."

"Then I suggest we go back to the Pride Lands," Haiba concluded, quickly running off in the direction of Simba's kingdom.

Simba chased after Haiba. Nala frowned, following at them. "Oh, can we not do the running thing? I want to have a cub, Simba! We haven't accomplished that yet! Don't pretend like you—"

The three of them stopped when they heard the birds again. They all looked up at the sky, but couldn't see any birds around. What was going on?

And that's when they started to feel tired again.

So, so tired...

Simba, Nala and Haiba slowly slumped to the ground, their eyes closed.

They felt like they could sleep for ever...

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: The King of Dreams

Chapter Four: The King of Dreams

Simba, Nala and Haiba woke up in the cave – cubs again. They all stood up, leaning against each other. "Oh, I don't like this," Nala said, a worried look on her face. "I don't like this at all. I *hate* this. This is definitely real, it's definitely this one." She narrowed her eyes in realisation. "I keep saying that, don't I?"

Simba got to his paws, wandering over to the side of the cave. He shivered a little. "It's *really* cold," he said, putting his forepaws across his chest to try and keep warm. It was like the temperature was getting colder... Colder and colder... "I mean, like, 'shiver and shake' cold. I think if I try to move my tuft around then it'll break off."

"It's not very warm underneath the ground," Haiba informed him, also feeling the chill inside the cave. "Not a lot of people know that, actually." He listened to the sound of dripping water. He couldn't hear where the sound was coming from, though. "Sounds like we're quite closer to a river – or something similar."

"We could always hug each other," Haiba suggested. "That's what conserves warmth. A nice, big hug. It doesn't really matter – that's what you and Nala were doing in the jungle, anyway."

"Hey!" Simba exclaimed, shooting a disapproving glare at Haiba. "I know you're into that stuff, Haiba, but that doesn't mean / am! I've got standards! A reputation! I'm not ready for... those kind of things yet. Can we just forget about it?"

"Considering the situation, no," Haiba answered. "Someone's got to be behind this. Switching between two different locations isn't something that happens every day. This is probably the work of some evil mastermind, hell-bent on destroying us all!"

Right on cue, a lion suddenly appeared in the centre of the cave. He looked a little bit like Simba when he was an adult – although his fur was a slightly darker shade, and his eyes were cold and brown. The mane also looked a little like the colour of blood... but the three cubs might have just been imagining that.

The lion looked up at the ceiling. "Well, that took a while," he said, as if he'd appeared in the cave on his own accord. He then shot a look at Simba. "Honestly, I'd heard such good things about you, Simba. You're supposed to be a great and mighty young hero – or a very *adult* hero, depending on how you look at it."

"Wait a sec, how did you get in here?" Simba asked, feeling even more confused now. It was bad enough switching between the cave and the jungle, but now there was a fully grown *lion* in the middle of the cave? Simba felt like his brain was going to melt any second now... "Who are you?"

The lion narrowed his eyes – like there wasn't an answer to be had. "What shall we call me?" he wondered. Suddenly, a thought occurred to him. "Well, if you're the King of the Pride Lands," he said, pointing to Simba, "then let's call me the King of Dreams."

Simba eyed the 'King of Dreams' up and down. "Nice look," he commented.

The King of Dreams pointed to himself. "This?" he said, his eyes widening. "Oh, I don't know, I'm not convinced. I mean, a red mane? That's just so... *outstanding*. I prefer to stick to the shadows, if I'm honest."

He would have got on well with Uncle Scar, Simba thought to himself. He glanced down at the ground and picked up a little stone, before throwing it at the King of Dreams.

The stone went right through him, bouncing across the ground, where it came to a halt at the cave wall. "Interesting..." said Simba, his eyes narrowed. *What is this guy, a ghost from the past or something?*

"I'd love to be impressed, but King of Dreams – it's in the name, isn't it?" said the King of Dreams, smiling at Simba. "Spooky... not quite there..." He vanished, and reappeared behind Simba, surprising him. "And yet, very much *here*."

Simba jumped back a bit, staring at the King of Dreams. "I'll do the talking, if you don't mind," he told the mysterious lion. "Nala, do you want to take a guess at who this is?"

"Um... King of Dreams." Nala thought for a second. "He creates... Well, he creates dreams, obviously."

"Dreams, nightmares, cheap tricks," Simba replied, thinking he'd figured this lion out.

"And what about the cutie here?" The King of Dreams asked, pointing at Haiba. "Doesn't he get a guess?"

"Hey, listen, if anybody's the cutie here, then it's Simba," Haiba told him.

The King of Dreams chuckled in response. "That's a delusion I'm not responsible for," he replied. The three cubs couldn't tell if he was joking or not...

"No, but he is," Haiba insisted, before looking at Nala. "Isn't he, Nala?" he asked, expecting her to reply, "Yes, Haiba, he is."

"Oh, Nala, you have to sort your friends out," the King of Dreams cut in quickly, approaching Nala. "*Choose*, even."

"I *have* chosen," Nala informed him. "Of course I've chosen." She pulled Simba to her side. "It's you, Simba."

"Oh, good." Simba chuckled nervously. "Thanks."

"You can't fool me," said the King of Dreams. "I've seen your dreams," he told Nala, sending a chill up her spine. "Some of them twice. I'd blush if I had a blood supply... or a real face, for that matter."

"Okay, mister, where did you pick up this 'creepy' act?" Simba demanded, staring at the King of Dreams.

The odd lion looked offended by that. "*Me*? You're on very thin ice, Simba," he warned the Prince of the Pride Lands.

Simba raised an eyebrow. "*Am* I?"

The King of Dreams narrowed his eyes. "Now where was I...?"

Haiba blinked a couple of times. "Um, you were..."

The King of Dreams vanished, before reappearing beside Haiba. "I know where I was," he told the surprised cub. "So, here's your challenge: two worlds. One's in the cave, and the other is in the kingdom. One is real, the other's fake. And just to make it more interesting, you're going to face a deadly danger in both worlds. But only *one* of the dangers is real."

The sound of birdsong rung through the cave. "Tweet, tweet, time to sleep," said the King of Dreams.

Simba, Nala and Haiba's eyes all started to flicker, the three of them suddenly feeling very sleepy... *Very, very* sleepy...

The three cubs collapsed to the ground, their eyes closed, asleep once more.

The King of Dreams chuckled. "Or are you waking up?"

AN: A new villain! Who is the mysterious King of Dreams? He seems to be making this story more and more confusing by the second. But hey, it's in his nature. Wouldn't you do the same if you could control dreams?

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: What's Real and What's Not

AN: The plot thickens, as they say. I see you're all still trying to figure this out. Oh, it's fun, isn't it?

Kutiel - Kwame: Block out the sound? I'm afraid it's not as simple as that. The King of Dreams works in mysterious ways...

Thomash905: Don't be so sure. Anything can happen in my stories. *Anything...*

Chapter Five: What's Real and What's Not

Simba, Nala and Haiba woke up by the water hole, back to being adults. "How did we get here?" Simba asked, looking around. "But we didn't... We didn't walk here. How come all of a sudden we've suddenly ended up here?"

"I guess in the dream world you can do anything," Haiba replied. "Especially if you're the *King* of Dreams – unless of course, this is the real world, and the cave is the dream."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear," said the King of Dreams from behind the three, shaking his head. "You don't understand, do you? Simba, your brain is completely see-through." He then smiled. "But I've always been able to see through you."

Nala viewed this strange lion with odd confusion. She just couldn't work him out. "Always?" she said, narrowing her eyes. "What do you mean by 'always'?" she asked, hoping for some kind of logical answer.

But somehow, she doubted she would get one.

"Now then, the answer is this," said the King of Dreams. "If you die in the dream, you wake up in reality. Healthy recovery in next to no time. Ask me what happens if you die in reality."

"What happens if you die in reality?" Haiba asked him.

The King of Dreams rolled his eyes. "You die, stupid. That's why it's called reality," he replied, staring at Haiba as if he were some kind of idiot.

"Have you met Simba before?" Nala cut in quickly, a curious expression on her face. She turned to Simba. "Do you know him? Simba, do you?"

"Now don't get jealous," said the King of Dreams. "He's been around, our Simba. Never mind that. You've got a world to choose. *One* reality was always too much for you, Simba. Take two and call me in the morning."

He grinned and chuckled evilly, before vanishing, as if he were never even there. "Oh, I don't like him," Haiba mumbled, looking down at the ground. The way he spoke, the things he said... It was just so confusing! Couldn't the King of Dreams give them a straight answer for once?

Unfortunately, it didn't seem like it.

"Who is he?" Nala wondered, staring at Simba. Somehow, for a very weird reason, she suspected that her mate held the answer to that. Maybe there were secrets – deep, dark secrets – that Simba was keeping from her.

Simba shrugged. "I don't know," he replied, sounding honest. "It's a big world. He could be anyone. I've never met him before." He stared at Nala, who had an unconvinced expression on her face. "Honestly."

"All right, then why is he doing this?" Nala asked. The King of Dreams hadn't exactly given them a purpose for his actions yet. Right now, it seemed like some kind of game he was playing. As if it was all just fun for him.

"Maybe because he's not entirely real," Simba mused, a thoughtful look on his face. "He doesn't have a true form. Maybe that upsets you after a while. So maybe now he's taking it out on people like us who can touch and eat and feel."

"What did he mean by 'deadly danger'?" Haiba wondered, looking around the water hole. Nothing seemed to be happening. Nothing *dangerous*, anyway. "So far, nothing's happened. It's just... a bit boring, really."

"Except for one little thing you're really missing..." Simba said, his eyes narrowed as he slowly turned around. "Where is everyone?"

"Good question," said Nala, realising that there wasn't a sound to be heard anywhere in the Pride Lands. It seemed like

it was just the three of them. "It looks like... everyone's gone."

"*Kufa inawadia...*"

Simba whipped round. "Did you say something, Haiba?" he asked upon hearing that voice.

"What?" Haiba looked confused, before pointing to himself. "Me?" He shook his head. "No. I didn't say anything."

"Then what was that voice?" Simba asked, looking around. But no one was there. Not a soul in sight. "Didn't you hear it?"

"Simba..." She narrowed her eyes at him. "There wasn't any voice. I didn't hear anything. Just what are you talking about?"

Simba looked upwards. "I thought I..." He shook his head frantically. "Oh, never mind. I must be going crazy. Blame that stupid King of Dreams for messing with my head. As if it hasn't been messed around with enough already..."

"So they've gone," Haiba concluded, his eyes darting left and right. "Everyone in the kingdom has gone."

"Not exactly," Simba replied, before spotting a hill in the distance. "Come on," he called to the two, running in the direction of the hill. "To that hill!"

"What for?" Nala asked, following him.

"To get a good look at things," was his reply, as he started to clamber up the hill. When he got to the top, a smile appeared on his face. "I knew it."

Nala and Haiba got to the top, standing on either side of Simba. "Oh..." said Haiba, looking a little surprised. "I didn't expect that."

Four lionesses were stood at the bottom of the hill, motionless expressions on their faces. They looked as if they were in some kind of hypnotic trance. Either that or they were thinking really, *really* hard.

"I'm good at sniffing out things that aren't what they seem," Simba replied, sounding impressed with himself. "So come on. Let's think. The way this world works... Time asleep matches time in our dream world. So it's not like normal dreams."

"And we're dreaming the same dream at the same time," said Nala, adding to the information.

"Probably some kind of communal trance thing," Haiba concluded. "Very rare. And very complicated, too."

"I'm sure there's gotta be some kind of giveaway," Simba said, scratching his head. "But my mind isn't working because this kingdom is so dull! I'm slowing down, like you two have." He looked down at the bottom of the hill, where the lionesses were. "I wouldn't trust them to babysit, if I were you," he said to Nala. "What are they doing down there? What do they want?"

The birdsong started up again.

Nala sighed. "Oh, here we go again."

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: Far Too Cold

Chapter Six: Far Too Cold

Simba, Nala and Haiba wandered around the cave, all of them shivering from how cold it was. "It's really cold," Nala muttered, hopping from left to right to try and conserve warmth. "I wouldn't mind trying out Haiba's 'big hug' idea right now."

"What does it matter if we're cold?" Simba snapped, ignoring how low the temperature was right now. "We need to figure out what those lionesses were up to." He rubbed his face, frowning. "I'm sorry."

"I want the other life," Haiba realised. "The one where we're happy and settled and everything is perfect."

"But it makes you wonder, doesn't it?" Nala cut in. "If that life is real, then why would we give up all of this? It may be dangerous, but it's just... fun. Why would we give it up, huh?"

"Because we're going to freeze to death?" Haiba suggested in a half-joke.

"Simba will fix it," Nala assured her. "He always fixes things. He's the *master* at this kind of thing." She looked up at the ceiling, shivering a little bit more. "Why is the King of Dreams doing this to you? Why us?"

"We're in trouble," said Simba, a concerned look on his face. "I knew we were right next to a river or something." He walked over to the wall, putting his paw against it. He frowned. "It's getting colder by the second." A sudden feeling of dread washed over him. "We're freezing. That's our danger for this world."

"Then this must be a dream," said Nala. "I mean, just because we're next to a river doesn't mean this cave is going to get colder. I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yeah, is that possible?" Haiba wondered.

"I can't know everything," Simba replied. "Why does everyone expect me to, always? It gets kinda annoying after a while." He sat on the ground, suddenly feeling very helpless indeed.

"Okay, so this is something you haven't seen before," Haiba realised. "So does that mean this is the dream?"

"I don't know, but can you hear that?" Simba asked, listening to a quiet noise coming from above them.

The sound of rumbling could be heard from above. The sound of *rocks* rumbling. "Great, so now the cave's about to collapse!" Simba exclaimed. "We've probably got about fifteen minutes before we go *splat!* But that's not really a problem."

"Because you know how to get us out of this?" Haiba hoped, a little grin spreading across his face.

"No," was Simba's reply. "Because we'll freeze to death first," he told him, only managing to make the situation feel even more hopeless.

"Then what do we do?" Nala asked, staring at Simba with widened eyes. What was he going to do, just stand there and wait for the three of them to die? That wasn't the Simba she knew!

"Stay calm," Simba answered. "Don't get sucked in – like Haiba said – because this might be the danger we have to die in."

"Oh, this is so you," Haiba said, giving Simba a knowing stare.

Simba looked confused. "What?"

"It's getting colder, I've got fourteen minutes to live, and you're the only cub who can save us. I just wanted the nice, happy, simple life," Haiba said with a sigh. Somehow, he'd lost faith in Simba's heroic abilities.

The King of Dreams appeared behind Simba. "Oh, Simba," he remarked. "Dissent in the ranks."

He smiled, and began a little rhyme:

"There was a young cub from far away
Who ended up throwing his life away

He let down his friends and—"

He stopped when the birdsong was heard. "Oh, I'm all out of time," he said, sounding disappointed. He looked at the three cubs. "Don't spend too long in the other world, otherwise you might catch your death in here."

"This is the real one," Haiba stated, nodding. The three of them were back at the Pride Lands, adults once more. "I just feel it." He looked at Simba. "Don't you feel it?"

Nala sighed, looking completely lost. "I feel it both places," she replied, realising that she was most likely never going to figure this out.

"I feel it here," Haiba insisted. "It's just so... tranquil and relaxed. Nothing bad could ever happen here."

"But..." Nala looked left and right. "It's not exactly *me*, though, is it? Would I really be happy settling down in a kingdom where everything's totally perfect?" She looked down at the ground, and her eyes widened. "Simba, why are there piles of dust on the ground? And where have those lionesses gone?"

Simba rushed down the hill, and ran across the field, arriving in the middle. Around him were three piles of dust. "I think they're animals." He then frowned. "Or at least, what's *left* of them."

Nala gasped, horrified. "Oh, my gosh..."

"What happened to them?" Haiba asked, staring down at the piles of dust. If they were supposed to be the remains of animals, then it seemed that they had been completely disintegrated.

Simba narrowed his eyes, looking towards the edge of the field. "I think *they* did," he said, pointing at the four lionesses standing there.

"But they're just any old lionesses," Nala said, following Simba's gaze.

"No – they're *creepy* lionesses," Simba corrected her. "There's a big difference between a lioness who *is* creepy and a lioness who *isn't* creepy."

Simba was about to head towards them when the King of Dreams appeared in front of him. "Hello, peasants," he greeted them. "What's this, attack of the lionesses? Oh, that's ridiculous. This has *got* to be the dream, hasn't it? What do you think, Nala? Let's all jump off a cliff and wake up safe and sound! Who's first?"

"Leave her alone!" said Simba threateningly.

The King of Dreams smiled. "Oh, do that again. I love it when he does that. The tall dark, hero. 'Leave her alone.'"

"Just leave her!" Haiba cried.

"Not quite so impressive," remarked the King of Dreams. "But I know where your heart lies, don't I, Nala?"

"Shut up!" Nala snapped angrily. "Just shut up and leave me alone!"

"Stop it," Simba said to the King of Dreams. "Come on. Drop the act. I know who you are."

The King of Dreams didn't look very convinced. "No, you don't," he retorted.

"Of course I do," Simba told him, staring into the King of Dreams' eyes. "I don't have any idea how you can be here, but there's only one person in the world who hates me as much as you do."

"Never mind me!" the King of Dreams exclaimed. He pointed towards the edge of the field. "It's *them* you should be worrying about!"

The King of Dreams vanished as one of the lionesses stepped towards them. Haiba smiled at the sight of her. "Hey, I know you!" he said.

"Haiba..." Simba began in a warning tone.

"Oh, that's just Pumzi," said Haiba. "She used to sneak me the extra bit of food every time we had dinner."

Suddenly, the lioness grabbed Haiba by the neck, lifting him up. "Did I forget to say thank you?" Haiba asked her, before

he was thrown violently to the ground. "How did she do that?" he asked, astonished. He quickly got to his paws, backing away.

"I suspect she's not herself," replied Simba, staring at the lioness. "You might want to get ready to run. *Fast*."

"Can't we just talk to them?" Nala asked.

The lioness opened her mouth to reveal an eye. It was green and dripping with some kind of slime.

Nala's eyes widened. "There is an eye in her mouth!"

Haiba was the first to realise what was going on. "There's a whole creature inside of her. Probably inside all of them. I bet they've been living here for years, waiting to feast on our guts!"

"That is disgusting," said Simba, horrified. "Those eyes aren't going to be coming out of anywhere else, are they?"

AN: Your mind must be exploding by now. What's real? What's not? Everything is so crazy! Well, don't worry. You'll get your answer soon enough – and it might not be the one you're expecting...

***Chapter 7*: Chapter 7: Nala's Choice**

AN: Time for all this confusion to come to an end. None of you have guessed the right answer as to what is the reality. It's gonna be a bit of a surprise...

arianastar1529: Ha-ha! That made me laugh! That might just end up as one of Haiba's quotes now!

Reldor: Indeed.

Chapter Seven: Nala's Choice

The lioness lunged forward at the three of them, screeching in an unearthly voice. A green mist sprayed out of her open mouth, causing them to jump back in surprise. "What the heck are they doing?" Nala asked, her eyes widened in shock. She'd never seen anything like this before in her life!

"Poisonous gas," Haiba replied, his eyes fixed on the crazed lioness. "Told you they were dangerous. I think, Nala, you should follow Simba's plan: run. Both of you. I'll stay here and hold them off."

"Are you sure?" Simba asked, amazed by Haiba's courage. Here he was, up against something he'd never even seen before, and already he was willing to put his life at risk. He really couldn't have asked for a better friend.

"Very sure," was his answer. "Just go!"

Simba tapped Nala on the side. "Come on," he said. "We'd better do as he says."

"But he'll die!" Nala argued.

"Yeah, and maybe that's the answer," Simba replied, trying to pull her away from the field. "You're forgetting – this could be the dream. All of this might not be real."

"It *fee/s* real!" Nala cried, before realising that there was nothing she could do to help if she stayed. She sighed. "Let's just go. I've had enough of this. Come to think of it, I had enough *ages* ago."

Simba and Nala ran off as fast as they could, leaving Haiba on his own with the peculiar lionesses. "Leave them alone," he said to them. "Talk to me. Talk to me." He eyed them up and down. "You must be some kind of proud, ancient race – you're better than this. Why are you hiding away here? Why aren't you at home?"

The lioness that stood in front of Haiba began to speak, in a raspy, hushed tone. "We were driven from our—"

"Home by nasty neighbours," Haiba finished for her. That was pretty easy to figure out.

The lioness spoke again. "So now we've—"

"Been living in the bodies of innocent lionesses for years and years," Haiba concluded. "No wonder you look so young after all this time – you're keeping them alive," he realised, raising his eyebrows.

"We were humbled and destroyed," the lioness said. "And now we will do the same to others."

Haiba nodded in agreement. "Okay. Fair enough, I suppose – which means this could be the reality," he said. "So are you what's killing all of the animals around the kingdom?" he asked.

The lioness responded by turning to one of her cohorts. She opened her mouth wide and sprayed out the green mist.

The result was instantaneous. The lioness screamed in pain, melting away until all that remained of her was a pile of dust on the ground.

Haiba frowned, and glared at the lioness. "You need to leave," he told her firmly. "Now."

The lioness hissed at him angrily.

Somehow, Haiba doubted that was an option for these girls.

Simba didn't know what to do. Everything had become way too confusing for him now. Even more confusing than when his whole world had changed, and Nala was in love with Haiba. But that was years ago...

Unless this was the dream. He didn't know for sure. Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't. He just couldn't tell. This King of Dreams, or whatever he liked to call himself, had made everything look and feel completely real. Right down to the last detail. Simba suspected that if he saw a flying elephant then it would somehow look realistic.

"Simba, where are we going?" Nala asked as she ran across the dusty ground of the Outlands. "We're just running all over the place! Don't you have some kind of plan? Is there *anything* going on in that brain of yours?"

Simba stopped next to the opening of a cave. "In here," he said quickly, before pushing Nala into the cave, following her inside. "We should be all right in here. Well... I *think* we should be all right. I can't really tell, if I'm honest."

"We just ran away," Nala said, sounding ashamed of herself. "We just left Haiba all on his own. We haven't seen him for years, we don't really connect with him anymore and now all of a sudden he sacrifices himself for us."

"You know Haiba," replied Simba. "He'll do anything to make himself look handsome. I remember that time when I asked him if he was dropped on his head at birth."

Nala narrowed her eyes. "I believe he said, 'In a pool of sexy.'"

Haiba was stumbling down a hill as the sound of birdsong invaded his ears. He was fighting so hard to stay awake. Those lionesses – those *creatures* – were following him. He needed somewhere to hide. Somewhere where they couldn't reduce him to dust. He couldn't let them get to him. He didn't know what was real yet!

Haiba dived into a cave – and the King of Dreams was waiting for him. "Oh, you're such a big wuss, aren't you, Haiba?" he teased.

"Oh, shut up," Haiba said, his eyes flickering as he fought to stay conscious. "I'm busy." The birdsong seemed to get louder, and Haiba slipped to the ground. He couldn't fight it anymore. He just couldn't.

The King of Dreams pretended to look concerned. "Oh, wait a minute," he said. "If you fall asleep here, those lionesses are going to come in and finish you off, Haiba."

Haiba covered his ears with his paws, desperate to block out the sound of the birds.

But the King of Dreams wasn't impressed. "Covering your paws with your ears? Brilliant!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "What's next, shouting 'boo'?"

He looked towards the outside of the cave, where the lionesses were. He beckoned for them to join him. "Come in! Come in!" he called. "He's in here! We've got a nice meaty lion for you to eat!" He turned to Haiba. "Hey, there's lots at steak here, isn't it? Get it? Lots at *steak*!"

Haiba stumbled into a hole in the ground, but it wasn't enough to hide him from the lionesses. The King of Dreams frowned. "Are these jokes wasted on you?"

Haiba tried to get up, but the birdsong became even louder, and he collapsed to the ground. "Wait, stop..." he pleaded.

The King of Dreams covered his eyes with his paws. "Oh, I can't watch!"

Haiba's eyes lit up when he spotted a tunnel inside the hole. Using all of his available strength and effort, he crawled into the tunnel, finally obscuring himself from being found. He closed his eyes, drifting off to sleep again. At last, he was safe.

For now.

Simba, Nala and Haiba woke up in the cave, reverting back to cubs.

Nala shivered even more, her teeth chattering a little. "It's even colder now," she said, a cloud of icy mist coming out of her mouth when she talked.

"Okay, we have to decide now which is the dream," Simba said quickly, an urgent look on his face as he got to his paws.

"It's this, here," Haiba said, pointing to the ground.

"He could be right," Nala told Simba. "I mean, it all seems wrong here. How can it be getting colder just because we're next to a river?" She shook her head. "It just doesn't add up."

"*Anything* is possible in our crazy lives!" Simba exclaimed. "It's a big world, you know! But we have to agree which battle to lose. All of us, *now*."

"Okay, which world do *you* think is real?" Nala asked him.

"This one," Simba answered.

"No, the other one!" Haiba argued, his eyes widening.

Simba sighed. "Yeah, but are we disagreeing, or *competing*?" he wondered.

"Competing over what?" said Nala, looking slightly perplexed.

Simba and Haiba just stared at Nala as she got up, groaning a little.

"We've got about nine minutes," Simba said, looking even more worried now. He shuddered. "Man, it's cold. I don't know *how* cold, but I can't feel my paws and... other parts."

"I think all my parts are basically fine," Haiba said.

"Stop competing!" Simba snapped.

Haiba shook his head. "We're not going to die. We can't die – *can* we?"

"I hope not," replied Simba, a lump in his throat. "But we're running out of time. If we fall asleep here, we're in trouble."

He started pacing around, putting his brain to work. "If we could split up, then we could be in both worlds at the same time, but the King of Dreams is switching us back and forth." He started fiddling with his tuft. "Why, why, what does it all mean?"

The King of Dreams appeared beside Simba. "Good idea, Simba!" he exclaimed. "Let's divide you three up, so I can have a chat with our lovely companion," he said, shooting a look at Nala. "Maybe I'll keep her, and you can have Mister Sexy to yourself for all of eternity, should you manage to clamber aboard some sort of reality."

The birdsong began for what felt like the billionth time now. "Can you hear that?" Haiba asked Nala.

Nala shook her head. "Hear what?"

"Nala, don't be scared, we'll be back," Simba told her, before he and Haiba fell to the ground, asleep.

"Simba, Haiba, don't leave me!" Nala cried, but it was no use. She worriedly looked up at the King of Dreams.

He had a little smile on his face. "Nala, we're going to have fun, aren't we?"

Needless to say, Nala was terrified. "No," she said. "No, please, not alone."

Haiba opened his eyes, and crawled out of the tunnel, looking around for any sign of the lionesses. But they were nowhere to be seen. *Where have they gone?* he wondered, but there was no time to think.

Quickly, Haiba hopped out of the hole and ran away from the cave. *I've got to find Simba*, he thought as he sprinted across a field. *But where would he be?*

Nala stared at the King of Dreams, feeling so very frightened. "Poor Nala," he said. "Simba always leaves you, doesn't he? Alone in the dark. Never apologises."

Nala frowned, turning away from the creepy lion. "He doesn't have to," she mumbled.

"That's good – because he never will," the King of Dreams said with a chuckle. "And now he's left you with me. Spooky, old, not-to-be-trusted me." He sat down, smiling at the scared cub. "Anything could happen."

Nala turned back to face him. "Who are you and what do you want?" she demanded. "Simba knows you, but he's not telling me who you are. And he always does. Takes him a while sometimes, but he tells me. But you... you're something different."

"Oh, is that who you think you are?" asked the King of Dreams, raising his eyebrows at Nala. "The one he trusts?"

"Actually, yes," Nala replied honestly.

"The one cub in the world who Simba tells everything?"

Nala glared at him. "Yes."

"Then what's his darkest secret?" the King of Dreams asked.

Seconds passed, but Nala couldn't come up with an answer. "That's just what I thought."

He pointed at Simba and Haiba, who lay on the ground, still asleep. "Now, which one of these two would you *really* choose? Look at them. You're currently with a bumbling, idiotic, naïve cub. Why not change him for Haiba, the handsome, quirky little hero?"

"Stop it!" Nala snapped, no longer in the mood for his games.

"But maybe Haiba's not as good as loving and losing Simba," the King of Dreams mused. He stood between Simba and Haiba. "Pick a world and this nightmare will be over. They'll listen to you. It's you they're waiting for. Nala's friend. Nala's *choice*."

With that, the King of Dreams vanished.

Simba sat inside the cave, staring at Nala, who was sleeping peacefully on the ground. But he doubted the dream – or reality, whatever was real – she was having was very peaceful. "He'd better not hurt her," he growled.

The King of Dreams appeared beside Simba. "It's make your mind up time in both worlds," he informed him.

"Go *away*," Simba sighed. "I need to find my friend."

"Friend?" The King of Dreams' eyes widened a little. "Is that what you call people you acquire? Friends are people you stay in touch with. They never see you again once they grow up. Do you prefer the company of the young, *old* man?" he taunted, before vanishing.

Nala's eyes snapped open. "What happened?" she quickly asked, grabbing Simba. "And where's Haiba?"

"Well, I—"

"Don't worry," Haiba cut in, jumping into the cave. "I'm here now. All right, now what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," Simba replied truthfully. "I thought the freezing cave was real... but now I'm not so sure."

Suddenly, a loud screeching was heard from outside the cave. "It's the lionesses," Haiba realised, horrified. "Why are they so desperate to kill us?"

"They're scared," was Simba's reply. "Fear generates savagery."

"Good answer," Haiba commented.

"Thank you." Simba took a few steps forward, so his head was poking out of the cave.

And that was when a lioness jumped out in front of him, screeching and spraying a green mist out of her mouth.

Simba fell backwards with a groan, having been hit by the mist. He collapsed against the back wall of the cave.

Haiba quickly slashed the lioness in the face with his claws in defence. She hissed at him and backed away – presumably to get some of her friends for assistance.

"*Simba!*" Nala cried, staring at her mate with horrified eyes.

"No..." Simba began to slowly dissolve away. "I'm... I'm not ready..."

"Stay," Nala urged him, tears running down her cheeks.

"Nala... I love you..."

Simba completely melted away, and all that remained of him was a pile of dust on the ground.

"No..." Nala shook her head in disbelief. "No. Come back."

"Nala..." said Haiba softly, putting a comforting paw on her shoulder.

Nala looked up at him with tear-stained eyes. "Save him," she ordered. "We save everyone. Bring him back. It's what we do."

"Not always," Haiba replied regretfully.

Nala just glared at him. "Then what is the point of you?" she spat.

She touched the dust on the ground, and could feel her heart breaking in two. She nodded. "This is the dream. Definitely, this one." She got to her paws, looking at Haiba. "If we die now, we wake up, yeah?"

Haiba nodded slightly. "Unless we just die."

"Either way, this is the only chance of seeing him again," Nala responded. "This is the dream."

Haiba just stared into her eyes. "How do you know?"

"Because if this is real life, I don't want it," was Nala's reply. "I don't want it."

Nala and Haiba walked out of the cave, past the three lionesses who were waiting for them.

But they did nothing.

"Why aren't they attacking us?" Nala asked.

"Either because this is the dream," replied Haiba, "or they know what we're about to do."

The two of them walked over to the edge of a cliff, looking down at the seemingly bottomless abyss below. "Be very sure," Haiba warned her. "This could be the real world."

"It can't be," Nala insisted. "Simba isn't here. I didn't know. I didn't, I didn't, I honestly didn't – until right now. I just want *him*."

Haiba turned his head to the side, and could see the King of Dreams staring at him from a distance, not saying a word.

"I loved Simba until he died," said Nala, looking down at the blackness before her. "And right at the end, I never got the chance to tell him that. But now he's gone."

Haiba looked at Nala, before together they leapt from the edge of the cliff, tumbling down, down, down into the nothingness below...

Simba, Nala and Haiba all woke up in the cave, and found they were all covered in a layer of ice. It was so cold right now. So cold that it wouldn't be long before they wouldn't even be able to move.

Nala quickly grabbed Simba, giving him a massive kiss on the muzzle. That alone seemed to warm her icy heart right now.

The King of Dreams appeared beside the three cubs. "So... you chose this world. Well done. You got it right. And with only seconds left." He shrugged. "Fair's fair. Let's warm you up."

He whacked the cave wall with his paw, and suddenly the whole interior seemed to warm up. It no longer felt like the inside of a giant snowball.

"I hope you've enjoyed your little fictions," the King of Dreams continued. "It all came out of your imaginations, so I'll leave you to ponder on that. I have been defeated. I shall withdraw. Farewell."

And then the King of Dreams disappeared. Hopefully for ever.

Simba slowly got to his paws, as did Nala and Haiba.

Simba blinked a few times, feeling a little confused. "Something happened. I... What happened to me?" he asked, as Nala embraced him in a tight hug. "Oh... Okay. Oh, right. This is good. I am liking this. Was it something I said? If it was, then can you tell me what it was in case of emergencies? And if necessary, birthdays? Anyway..."

Simba wandered off, looking around the cave.

"What do we do now?" Haiba asked. "We may have beaten him, but that still leaves us trapped down here."

"Well, I'm going to slit my throat," replied Simba, extending his claws and putting them to his neck, ready to slice it open.

Haiba's eyes widened in shock. "*What?*"

Simba looked at him. "Didn't you notice how helpful the King of Dreams was, guys? Okay, there was the wrong information, the bad jokes, and I could have done without the rhyme, but he was always so keen to make us choose between dream and reality." He chuckled.

"What are you doing?" Nala asked, horrified.

"Simba, the King of Dreams said this wasn't the dream!" Haiba exclaimed.

"Yes, it is!" Simba insisted.

"Haiba, stop him!" Nala yelled.

"The King of Dreams has no power over the real world," Simba began to explain. "He was offering us a choice between two dreams."

"How do you know that?" Nala asked.

"Because I know who he is," Simba replied. "You all ready?"

Nala and Haiba looked at each other. "No," they both replied, putting a paw to their throats.

"Good! Now do it!"

The three cubs all used their claws to slash their throats open, and everything went black...

Simba, Nala and Haiba woke up in the den at Pride Rock.

They were... they were home.

Haiba looked around confusedly. "What... what happened?" he asked, astonished at where they had woken up.

Simba got to his paws, sticking a claw up his nose. He pulled out a tiny, glittering thing, holding it up to the two. "What's that?" Nala asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Psychic pollen," Haiba realised, pointing to the glittering little bits. "Now *those* are rare."

"We must have accidentally inhaled them today," Simba concluded. "And we ended up all going into some kind of weird dream state."

"So that was the King of Dreams?" asked Nala. "Those little specks?"

Simba shook his head, smiling. "No, no, no. Sorry, wasn't it obvious? The King of Dreams was *me*. This stuff feeds on everything dark inside of you. It gives it a voice, turns it against you."

"But why didn't it feed on us, too?" Haiba wondered.

"Darkness in you two?" Simba grinned. "It would have starved to death in a second! I'm the Prince – I choose my friends carefully."

"But those things he said about you," Nala cut in. "You don't think any of that's true?"

"Never mind about that," replied Simba, before a thoughtful look appeared on his face. "What I want to know is this: I stopped the cave dream by killing myself, but what stopped the dream where we were all grown up?"

"We jumped off a cliff," Nala replied.

"Oh." Simba narrowed his eyes in confusion. "I don't remember that bit."

"No, you weren't there, you were already..." Nala began, trying to find the right words.

"What?"

"*Dead*. You died in that dream," Nala explained. "One of those lionesses got you."

"Okay. But how did you know it was a dream?" Simba asked. "Before you jumped off the cliff, how did you know that you wouldn't just die?"

"I *didn't*," was Nala's reply.

Simba realised. "Oh." He smiled, turning away from Nala. "Makes sense, I guess. Really, I shouldn't be—"

Simba stopped dead when he saw the King of Dreams staring back at him.

He blinked, and then the King of Dreams was gone. "What? I thought I... I thought I just saw..."

"Saw what?" Haiba asked.

Simba looked at Haiba, and then back at where the King of Dreams was. "... Nothing. It was... It was nothing." He looked down at the ground, almost appearing to be sad. "*Nothing*."

The End

AN: Surprise! From a technical viewpoint, this all took place inside the den! Funny, huh? So it turns out they were *both* dreams. And the King of Dreams was Simba's bad side, too! So many surprises, so little time!

So, onwards, upwards, and such. I can't wait until the next story. It's actually really good.

NEXT TIME: One day, Simba comes across a frog by the water hole. It latches onto his head, and brainwashes him into doing whatever he asks him to. Can Nala and Haiba stop this tiny little monster?